

LITERATURE, MEMORY, MYTH, HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Ontogeny, Phylogeny and epigenetics: In the case of evolution of man, body and mind relations, research has been going on to find out the connection of memory, past, thinking or writing of the past and its preservation¹. Unlike the European or American or West Asian thinking of evolution of man from monkey affecting the historiographical processes of every subject, because of theological implications, in South Asian, India in particular, there has not been any restriction, as the nomadic Aryans were composing the ancient literature (c.1500 BCE), that too, in a dead language now, or Dravidians Sangam literature after moving to Tamizhagam (c.300 BCE to 100 CE), of course both without any script but moving from one place to another. Yet, the Aryans were able to go on singing the poems, everywhere, they went with the same prosody, syntax, grammar. None has wondered about their memory, the ability of recording such poetry in their

brains and transmitting to their progeny. Of course, they were waiting for Asoka (269-232 BCE) to receive script from the Greeks, so that he started inscribing on the stones. It is not known as to how the Buddha (563-486 BCE), whose religion attracted Asoka to get converted, could have read the Vedas to oppose the vilified Brahmins. In other words, Buddha could have learned Sanskrit without script and oppose its religion, but had chosen to Pāṇini to record his teachings. Thus, the mnemonics of the Indians has not been noted by the historiographers so far. Here, the study of ontogeny², phylogeny³ and epigenetics⁴ come into play. The biological evolution and processes of development of language, literature and connected people and society, such factors have to be taken into consideration by the historiographers.

Memory, ideology and historiography: In recent times, the relation between memory and history has been taken up by the western scholars interpreting historical thinking processes among the ancient cultures and civilizations⁶. However, the debate is restricted to the Greek philosophers⁶, as the harbingers of the past, but ignoring the Indian counterparts. Social memory, collective memory, racial memory, communicative memory and such other types of expressions are used to identify "memories" existing among the surviving societies of humanity⁷. Later, the studies concentrate on the Jews, Zionism and related subjects⁸. In European context, the lacuna in transferring information from memory to writing is pointed out⁹ due to rivalry of the dominant people. In Indian context also, about the script and language of the Indus Valley Civilization, deciphering efforts could not succeed and thus, dubbing the civilized people of the civilization as "illiterate"¹⁰. Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition for historians, but existence of civilized people with refined literature but without script or getting script from others, but yet, the literature not written down and such issues exist in the Indian context. Therefore, the ancient Indians have also to be studied in the context, as their civilization has been in existence without break along with the Chinese¹¹.

Memory, myth, history and historiography: Memory cannot be limited to reminiscences, recollections and remembrances that could be recalled or not recalled. It is connected with the mental processes known to one's mind and recorded in brain. Individual memory could be different from collective memory of a family, society or humanity, but conditioned by the environmental and hereditary factors. History and archaeology with the help of science and technology have to analyze the recording of the past through the mental processes, as reflected in the literature. Ancient literature cannot be dated with the limited factors of formation of characters associated with sound, their reduction to script, letters turning into written documents, thus, historians to come and decide. As archaeologists cannot get all the material evidences involved in such concept, precept, evolution and development, either they or the historians cannot assert that people with literature are "literate" or with script but without literature

"illiterate". Historiographical methodology has been disillusioned with epistemology, fabricated with semantics and hypothesized interpretations. Thus, histories written under such controlled conditions have not been free from fiction, fabrication, or falsehood and they cannot vouchsafe that they could provide only facts with truth. Mythistory or History-myths, mythologized history or historicized mythology have become hysterical, fabulous and fictitious also, step by step in such interpretative processes. When they claim that they need not be objective¹², they lost their judicial acumen, impartial decision and neutrality, but always marred with bias, prejudice and pre-conceived notions turning into ideology.

Historiography, ideology and history: Unfortunately, in India, even after independence, historians started harming the historiography under the guise of protecting secular fabric, multi-strand, multicultural, multi-ethnic society. Many times, the study of past, particularly connected with the Sanskrit literature is considered as communal. Even new researchers are allergic and afraid of taking up studies connected with such subjects. In such ideological manipulations, the Marxist, Mohammedan and other groups join together, as they themselves acknowledge. This neo-communal, neo-political, neo-secular and other categories slowly transforming into professional despotism, scholar dictatorship, knowledge suppression, academic tyranny and repressing other intellectuals and peer groups. However, in recent studies, the responsibility of historians in such "faithful narratives" has been pointed out¹³. Literary techniques are used for understanding of historical processes¹⁴. In fact, either the scholars of the other groups were not cared or unofficially banned or purposely not invited for the issues discussed. As the media started pumping news of one category, the recipients consumed only such imposed stuff and made to accept or believe. Any discussion about Vedas, Itihasas and Puranas is always dubbed as "communalism", "Hindu nationalism" and so on, and therefore, even the neutral and silent categories, many times either hesitated to respond or kept silent. But, by keeping not responding or refuting their biased historiography might harm the Indian history, so that the coming generation could find it difficult to understand as to what extent it has been misinterpreted. Keeping these points in mind, the topic is pursued in a new angle.

The study of "poetry" as primary source and history: The critical study of the spread of Indian literature poses mainly chronological ambiguity, conflict and challenges. The millions of years of "yugas" may block the thinking of any researcher, but the geological ages have been in millions and historians cannot fit in those eons within their "historical" periods. However, the evolution of "historical man" cannot be restricted to his "preserved written records", as during the course of time, such records could have been lost irrecoverably. But, in "poetry", the memory about past events preserved pose challenge to historians. Though, the poetic description of the past appears myth, because of the legendary narrative, mystical characters, supernatural events, etc., all of them could not have arisen just out of figment of imagination.

The animals of Jurassic period still make historians incredible, but scientists make majority to believe. In the same way literature lives in the minds of millions of people, whether they want or not, believe or disbelieve. In spite of the passage of time, the remnants of literature can be noted from the material evidences available at different parts of the world. Historians have never fixed, calculated or devised any standards for "homo erectus" man to become "historic" passing the periods of usage of teeth, bone, wood, stone and metal.

Literature coming inside and going out of India: In Indian historical processes, it has been interpreted that lithic cultures, ethnic people, arts and sciences and other things came to India and then with such borrowed knowledge, Indians started learning. Thus, everything "coming inside India" has been favourable to historians, others also followed such theory and the curriculum accepted it as standard. Therefore, anybody thinks differently, proposes theory in other way or interprets in another way, it is derided and suppressed. Thus, Indian context, generally, historians have not thought about "out of India" hypothesis or theory for the presence of "Vedic / ancient Indian" elements outside India, particularly in the Middle East, Europe and Americas. It is not reversing the facts, but remembering the facts, which are well-known but slowly disappearing and even getting destroyed¹⁵. However, in the context of Indo-European, Indo-

Iranian, and Vedic-Zend studies, such congruency was noted, but downplayed after 20th century and slowly made to forget in the 21st century. Yet, the Boghokai inscription, Rama Hivastra of Ram Yast, sculptures reminding Ramayana make researchers to look for and realize the striking similarity. As the dating of Vedas had been reduced to c.1500 BCE, with the "Aryan invasion", everything going inside India is always accepted, but going out appears to be anathema, strange and unacceptable.

Chronology of past, memory and writing: When the Vedic people were living throughout the world and they started spreading due to geological disturbances, they must have carried the past in their memory with them. Historical past recorded in the brains of the people continue for millions of years through their progeny. The thinking processes transforming into objective and then converting into objective symbolism, as reflected in the material evidences found at various parts of the world, prove the fact. As soon as they settled at new places, they must have recollected, reproduced and recorded the past in their literature at the respective new locations. Because of shifting places, time elapsed for settling down and creation of new pasture, localization of the past would have also been occurred. Localization of past at a new place would lead to shifting, re-arrangement and even narrowing down of myths. As the places and people of the respective location were subjected to the geographical, climatic and other surrounding affecting factors, their representation in the literature and art forms also exhibited with variety.

Study in isolation and comprehensive research: Archaeological evidences of "living men" and strange animals have been found in the range of millions of years of the past. Material evidences have also been unearthed, but they could not be correlated with the lithic period of the respective sites. The scattered evidences prove that they were strewn due to geological disturbances. Study of them in isolation does not give correct picture, as researchers in such solitary confinements are bound to get affected by various factors. Therefore, bringing together of such exceptional evidences in a context and interpreting them in a comprehensive manner might invite severe criticism under the guise of censuring nationalism, patriotism and so on. Yet,

correlating, corroborating and circumstantial evidences, confirming them to the existing ancient civilization, substantiating with the living traditions, and proving with the continuing culture and heritage is sustainable. Now except Indians, no other people claim anything as their own as related to literature. The people of Iliad, Odyssey, Gilgamesh etc., do not celebrate like Indians remembering their heroes. The TV programmes of the epics do not arrest them from carrying out other routines, as happened in India.

Script, language and literature: That the date of Indian literature has been fixed c.1500-1200 BCE, but the introduction of the script in India is dated to c.300 BCE shows that Indians were illiterate for about 1200-900 years, yet, they were managing to record the whole compendium in their brains. One modern scholar claims that, "Indeed, written Vedic texts appear only after c. 1000 CE (note Albiruni's testimony about Vasukra in Kashmir, and the earliest Veda MSS in Nepal)", as the "Brahmins" never wanted Vedas to be written down¹⁶. In other words, it is not known who were preventing writing Vedas till c.1000 CE and getting written thereafter. Again how Vedas were preserved from c.300 BCE to c.1000 CE is also not known. That the Indians could keep memorizing Vedas till c.300 BCE is intriguing. Therefore, it is clear that the idea that the composers of Vedas were illiterate i.e, without script is totally wrong, as they had language and literature. In the same way, if somebody says that it was written down only in c.200 BCE, but verses were went on added till medieval period, until a critical edition was prepared in 20th century, it is also intriguing, because, the capacity of the people to remember millions and thousands of verses is more stimulating. The mnemonic power of the nomads, oppressors, suppressors, illiterates etc., has been fantastic indeed.

About the author

The author, K. V. Ramakrishna Rao graduating from Madras University in 1979 in Physics, then, proceeded to his multifarious activities by acquiring degrees in Psychology, Electronics & Telecommunications and Law. Started his research activities in 1987, he presented papers in national and international conferences and seminars. Presented 268 papers and published 147 till date (2014) in the proceedings, books, journals and websites covering Sangam Tamil literature, history,

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Starting with writing "Letters to Editor", he turned his attention towards research in 1987. His areas of special interest are Sangam Tamil literature and Ancient Indian Arts and Sciences. He has edited two books and published two. In 2000, he was invited by the Iranian National Commission for United Nation to present a paper, "Decoding and Decipherment of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat" to commemorate 900th death anniversary of Hakim Omar Khayyam at Neshabouri, Iran. He then visited Mauritius (2001), Sri Lanka (2002) and Malaysia (2003) to present papers. He has been a life member of Indian History Congress, South Indian History Congress, Tamilnadu History Congress, Andhrapradesh History Congress, All India Oriental Conference, Mythic Society etc. He has been an Associate Member of Institution of Engineers (India), Calcutta and General secretary of Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana Samiti, Tamilnadu. He has been a visiting faculty to National Academy of Customs, Excise & Narcotics (NACEN), Chennai. After working in two industries, at present he is working as an Assistant Commissioner in the department of Central Excise, Customs and service Tax.

References

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- 2 Ontogenesis is the development of a language or a language group produced from people with specific individual organism or anatomical or biological feature from the earlier stage to maturity.
- 3 Phylum + genesis = class + origin thus, again, in biology, phylogenesis is the evolutionary development and classification of species or group of organism [The Greek phule means race or tribe]. Phylogenesis is the evolutionary development and classification of a language or group of languages spoken by or still being spoken by certain people or group of people.
- 4 Epigenetics, in biology, is progressive development of an embryo from an undifferentiated egg-cell. Thus, it is progressive development of a language or group of languages spoken by a group of people or groups of people.
- 5 Michael S. Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013.

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- ⁹ Clanchy, Michael T. *From memory to written record: England 1066-1307*. John Wiley & Sons, 2012. http://courseweb.lis.illinois.edu/~katewill/spring2011-502/502%2Dand%2Dother%2Dreadings/clanchy_introduction.pdf
- ¹⁰ Steve Farmer, *Illiterate Harappans*, www.safarmer.com/indus.pdf
- ¹¹ The histograms show that these two exist since time immemorial, while the other civilizations appeared, rose, fell and disappeared.
- ¹² Objectivity marks a limit of historical interpretation [3] It is a criterion of validity which makes historical thinking and historiography plausible, i.e. it is a certain form of a truth claim, closely related to the rationalisation of historical thinking and its academic - not to say: scientific - character. Truth has always been a commitment of historiography. In the pre-modern rhetorical tradition of metahistory truth was conceptualised and prescribed for the historians as a moral attitude of historiographers and a rhetorical principle of their historiography. It was directed against prejudices and deformations of historical perspectives due to one-sided partiality in favour of one faction or actor in the presented past, and it was directed against the use of fictional elements in presenting the past. Jörn Rüsen, *Narrativity and Objectivity in Historical Studies, History and the Limits of Interpretation*, A Symposium, http://cohesion.nice.edu/humanities/csc/conferences.cfm?doc_id=369
- ¹³ Andrea Sterk and Nina Caputo, *Faithful Narratives: Historians, Religion, and the Challenge of Objectivity*, Cornell University, USA, 2014.
- ¹⁴ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow*, University of Georgia Press, Georgia, USA, 2008.
- ¹⁵ Taliban and ISIS have started destroying historical monuments, sculptures etc, in situ and as well as from the museums. Thus in coming years, the researchers might interpret that there were no such material evidences, though photos are available, which cannot be verified.
- ¹⁶ Michael Witzel, *Gandhāra and the formation of the Vedic and Zoroastrian canons*, in proceedings of the international symposium, the book, *Romania. Etudes euro- et afro-asiatiques*, pp 490-532, Bucharest: Biblioteca Bucurestilor.